

WASHINGTON – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today led a letter to House and Senate Armed Services Committee Chairmen and Ranking Members urging the adoption of several key provisions in the final FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act critical to addressing sexual assault in the military.

Slaughter and Rep. Michael Turner (OH-3), along with 45 bipartisan Members of Congress, pressed leaders to include stronger House-passed language from H.R. 1540, instead of Senate-passed language, arguing that the House language would provide greater protections to "ensure zero tolerance for sexual assault in the ranks."

"We have a duty to protect our men and women in uniform from the tragedy that is sexual assault in the military," the Members wrote to the Armed Services Committee leaders.

"Imagine being a victim of rape while serving in the military, and being forced to face your attacker each and every day in order to continue doing your job," said Slaughter. "That is what members of our armed forces have experienced, and will continue to experience if we don't do something to change the situation. It's preposterous and incredibly unjust to the individuals who choose to serve our country so proudly each day. That is why protections like expedited base transfer and improved confidentiality are so important to include in the National Defense Authorization Act."

The letter urged the adoption of five House provisions to strengthen the rights of sexual assault victims by clarifying victim access to legal counsel, record maintenance and confidentiality, and expedited unit or station transfer.

The Members also stressed the need for the NDAA to include comprehensive training and education programs for sexual assault prevention within the Department of Defense. The Senate-passed version did not include such programs.

Congresswoman Slaughter has been working for years to draw attention to the problem of sexual assault in the military. In March 2004, she led a hearing on this issue, and presented the transcript of the hearing to US Department of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. In May

2005, Rep. Slaughter introduced an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2006 National Defense Authorization bill to ensure the DoD provides better care to military victims of sexual assault.

In May of 2011, Congresswoman Slaughter introduced H.R. 1709, The Force Protection and Readiness Act, a set of new measures to deal with the epidemic of rape and sexual assault in the military. Slaughter's bill would create confidentiality to protect victims, allow an eased process for victims or their offender to be transferred from their current base, and expand training on sexual assault.

For more on Slaughter's work for women in the military, please [click here](#).

For a copy of the letter, please [click here](#).

Her full letter is below.

December 5, 2011

Dear Chairman Levin, Chairman McKeon, Ranking Member McCain, and Ranking Member Smith:

Thank you for your leadership in addressing the problem of sexual assault and rape in the military by including provisions in both the House- and the Senate-passed versions of the Fiscal Year 2012 National Defense Authorization Act that will provide greater protections for our service women and men stationed in the U.S. and abroad and help ensure zero tolerance for sexual assault in the ranks. We have a duty to protect our men and women in uniform from the tragedy that is sexual assault in the military.

As the FY 2012 National Defense Authorization Act proceeds to conference, we ask that you strongly consider finalizing the House-passed language from H.R. 1540 addressing sexual assault, specifically in the following sections of the bill:

- H.R. 1540 Section 583, as opposed to S. 1253 Section 563, regarding the access of sexual assault victims to legal counsel. The House version of the bill makes it clear that a victim of sexual assault is entitled to legal assistance.
- H.R. 1540 Section 584, as opposed to S. 1253 Section 564, regarding privileged communications between sexual assault victims and sexual assault response coordinators and victim advocates. The House version clearly states that the communications between a victim and a Victim Advocate are confidential.
- H.R. 1540 Section 585, as opposed to S. 1253 Section 566, regarding the maintenance of records prepared in connection with sexual assaults. Specifically, we believe that the final NDAA must spell out that records of sexual assault should be retained for as long as technically possible and that victims must have access to these records. Further, it must require the Department of Defense (DOD) to prepare a verbatim record of all court proceedings in which a charge of sexual assault is adjudicated and provide a copy to the victim, regardless of the outcome. These records are essential so that victims can claim Veterans benefits.
- H.R. 1540 Section 586, as opposed to S. 1253 Section 565, regarding expedited consideration and priority for application for consideration of a permanent change of station or unit transfer. The House version is more sensitive to the needs of the victim by requiring commanders to approve the victim's request to transfer duty stations.
- H.R. 1540 Section 587, regarding training and education programs for sexual assault prevention. While the DOD has made strides in training and education programs addressing sexual assault, we believe that DOD must have a comprehensive program where they consult with military and civilian experts that have experience with the prevention of and the response to sexual assault.

Including these provisions in the final FY 2012 National Defense Authorization Act will greatly improve the military's response to sexual assault. We must keep the pressure on DOD to protect our men and women in uniform, and we urge you to support this effort.

Sincerely,